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Viewing cable 09RIYADH824, SAUDI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST DECRIES STATUS OF

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09RIYADH824**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09RIYADH824	2009-06-21 16:08	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Riyadh

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/22/116306/wikileaks-saudi-crackdown-on-shiites.html>

VZCZCXRO5132
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHRH #0824/01 1721608
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 211608Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1026
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0115
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 0194

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000824

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP HARRIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/22/2009

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#) [SOCI](#) [KWMN](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST DECRIES STATUS OF
WOMEN & SHI'A

REF: A. RIYADH 346
[1](#)B. DHAHRAN 8
[1](#)C. JEDDAH 85
[1](#)D. DHAHRAN 14
[1](#)E. DHAHRAN 46

Classified By:
CDA Ambassador Richard Erdman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY
- - - -

¶1. (C) Saudi human rights activist Ibrahim Mugaiteeb told Poloff that the Kingdom's most pressing human rights issues were the status of women and the deteriorating situation of the Shi'a. Founder of Human Rights First Society, Mugaiteeb urged the USG to press the SAG to recognize non-governmental organizations. End Summary.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS: LEGAL STATUS VS. THE RIGHT TO DRIVE
- - - - -

¶2. (C) Saudi human rights activist Ibrahim Mugaiteeb met with Poloff on June 17 to discuss the current human rights situation in the Kingdom. Mugaiteeb identified what he considered the two most pressing human rights issues: the status of women and the deteriorating situation of the Shi'a. Noting that women comprise slightly more than 50% of the Saudi population, Mugaiteeb opined that the Saudi women's movement needed to focus on gaining independent legal identities equal to those of men. Mugaiteeb feared the right to drive, which attracted a lot of media attention, was a dangerous distraction. Western governments would likely view a change in this policy as a major success for Saudi women. In Mugaiteeb's opinion, however, the right to drive would have very little impact on the majority of Saudi women, since it would not eliminate the legal requirement for the permission of a related male that most women need to travel, work, own a business, etc. Changes to recognize and protect the legal status of women, on the other hand, would empower women to make basic choices about their lives.

SHI'A SITUATION WORSENING
- - - - -

¶3. (C) Mugaiteeb, himself a Shi'a, averred that the situation of the Shi'a (who comprise about 10% of the Saudi population) had worsened in the past eighteen months. Mugaiteeb pointed to a number of incidents of religious and political discrimination:

-- The recent closure of three Shi'a mosques/places of worship in al-Khobar which, although technically illegal due to a lack of government approval, had been in use for over 20 years.

-- The arrest of a prominent Shi'a cleric, Abdullah Saleh al-Muhanna, arrested in May for leading Friday prayers in a prayer place attached to his own home.

-- The frequent jailing of Shi'a, including leading clerics such as Sheikh Tawfiq al-Amer, for the "offense" of adding the name of the Caliph Ali to the prayer call. (NOTE: The call to prayer includes a declaration of Muslim beliefs i.e., "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger." The Shi'a like to add the phrase "and Ali is beloved of God," which many Wahhabis believe is blasphemous. End note.)

-- The King's failure to appoint any Shi'a to senior positions during his February 14 cabinet reshuffle.

-- The charge by an influential Sunni imam, Sheikh al-Kalbani, that Shi'a who did not agree with the Sunni view of the correct succession to the Prophet Muhammad were "infidels," which led to an outcry among Shi'a demanding his dismissal.

Other recent events included the Baqi'a cemetery incident

(Ref A, B, C and D) and protests in Awamiyya (Ref E), which have resulted in heightened tensions, especially in the Eastern Province.

NGO'S MUST BE LEGITIMIZED BY LICENSING

14. (C) Mugaiteeb raised the issue of the Saudi government's refusal to license NGO's in the Kingdom as a major roadblock for advancing human rights. Mugaiteeb's organization, Human Rights First Society (HRFS), is a widely-recognized private human rights organization, but it lacks legitimacy and struggles for funding because the Saudi government refuses to issue the organization an official license. HRFS applied for a license on three separate occasions, and on each occasion, the Saudi government denied the license. Mugaiteeb, who is in very poor health, expressed his worry that no member of HRFS is willing to step forward and help shoulder the responsibility of running the organization out of fear of the Saudi government since HRFS is not a legitimate organization. Mugaiteeb also claimed that although many EU countries have been very active in supporting HRFS and human rights in the Kingdom, he noted that "the U.S. is the only country that has the power to really do something." Mugaiteeb asserted U.S. support is essential if HRFS is to be successful in obtaining a license, thereby legitimizing the work of the organization and the human rights movement in the Kingdom.

COMMENT

15. (C) There is an atmosphere of distrust amongst activists, and fear of the Saudi government, which hampers the development of an effective human rights movement. Until organizations such as HRFS are officially recognized by the Saudi government, ordinary Saudis will be reluctant to engage openly to advance human rights.

ERDMAN